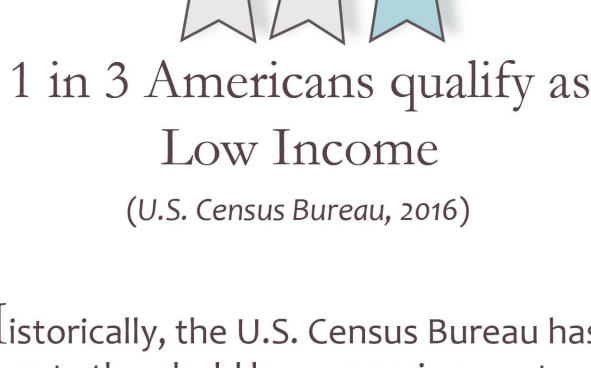


Poverty and Education Attainment in the United States

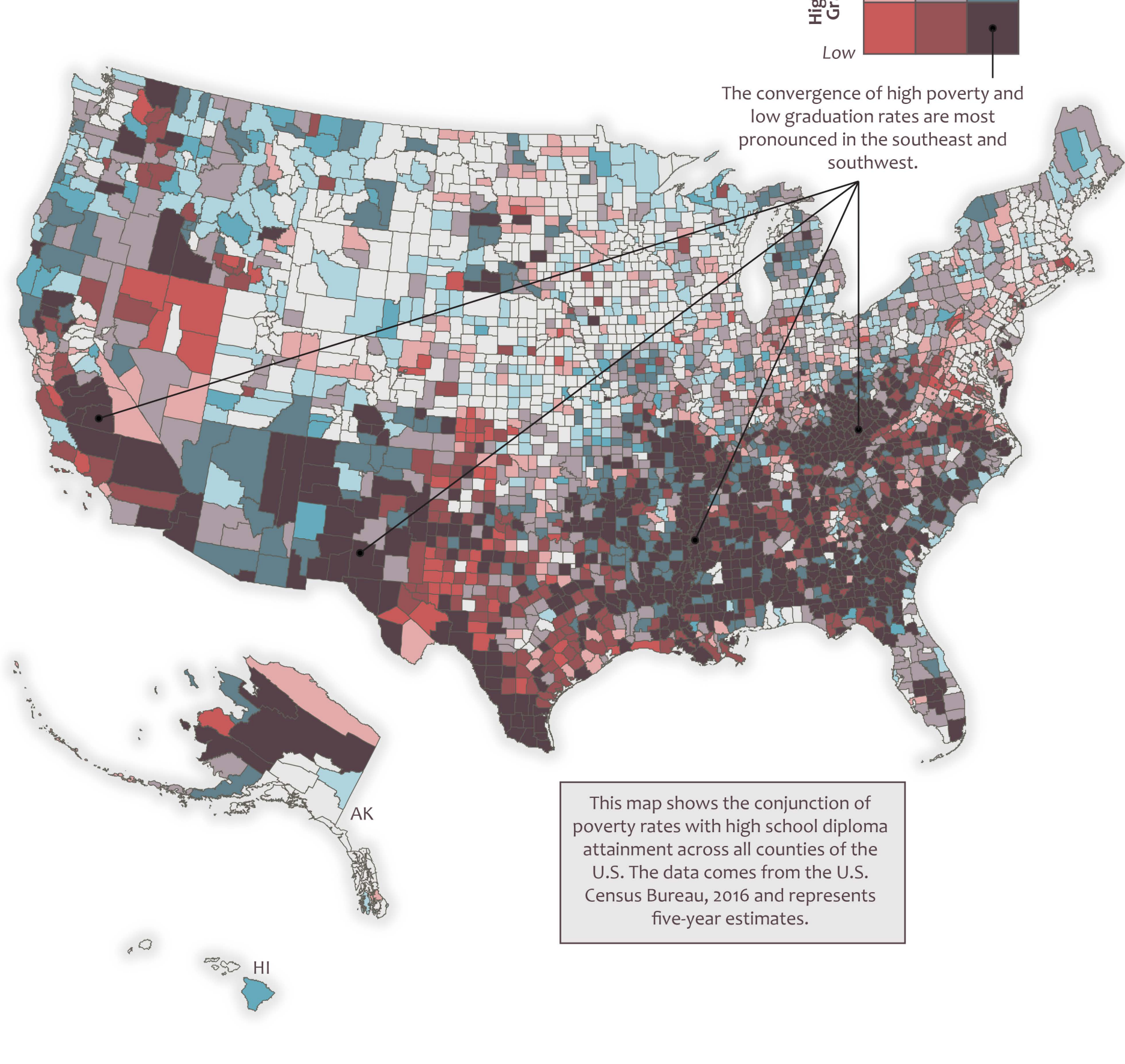
By Alex Machin-Mayes February, 19th 2018



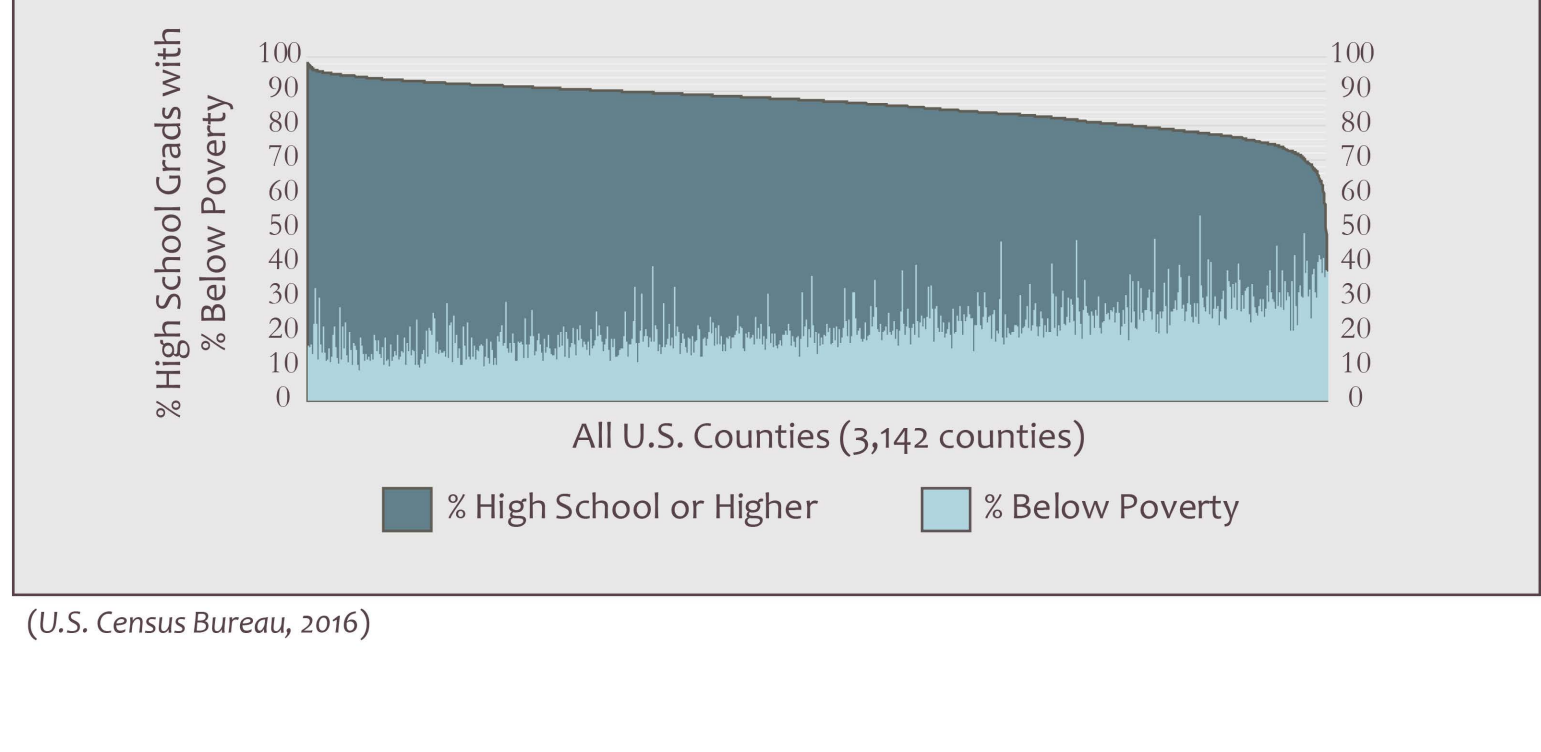
Historically, the U.S. Census Bureau has estimated the poverty threshold by comparing pre-tax income against three times the minimum cost of food in 1963, adjusted for inflation annually. There have been many arguments for additional factors to be considered in the metric that provide a more detailed picture of the variables involved (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

While determining the exact annual **poverty threshold** involves many social, economic, and geographic factors; essentially it is a **measurement of a family's ability to afford basic necessities like food, water, shelter, and utilities**. A family considered low-income earns below the estimated amount required to afford these basic necessities, while a family in poverty earns less than half that amount.

The Geography of Poverty and High School Graduation Rates in the U.S.

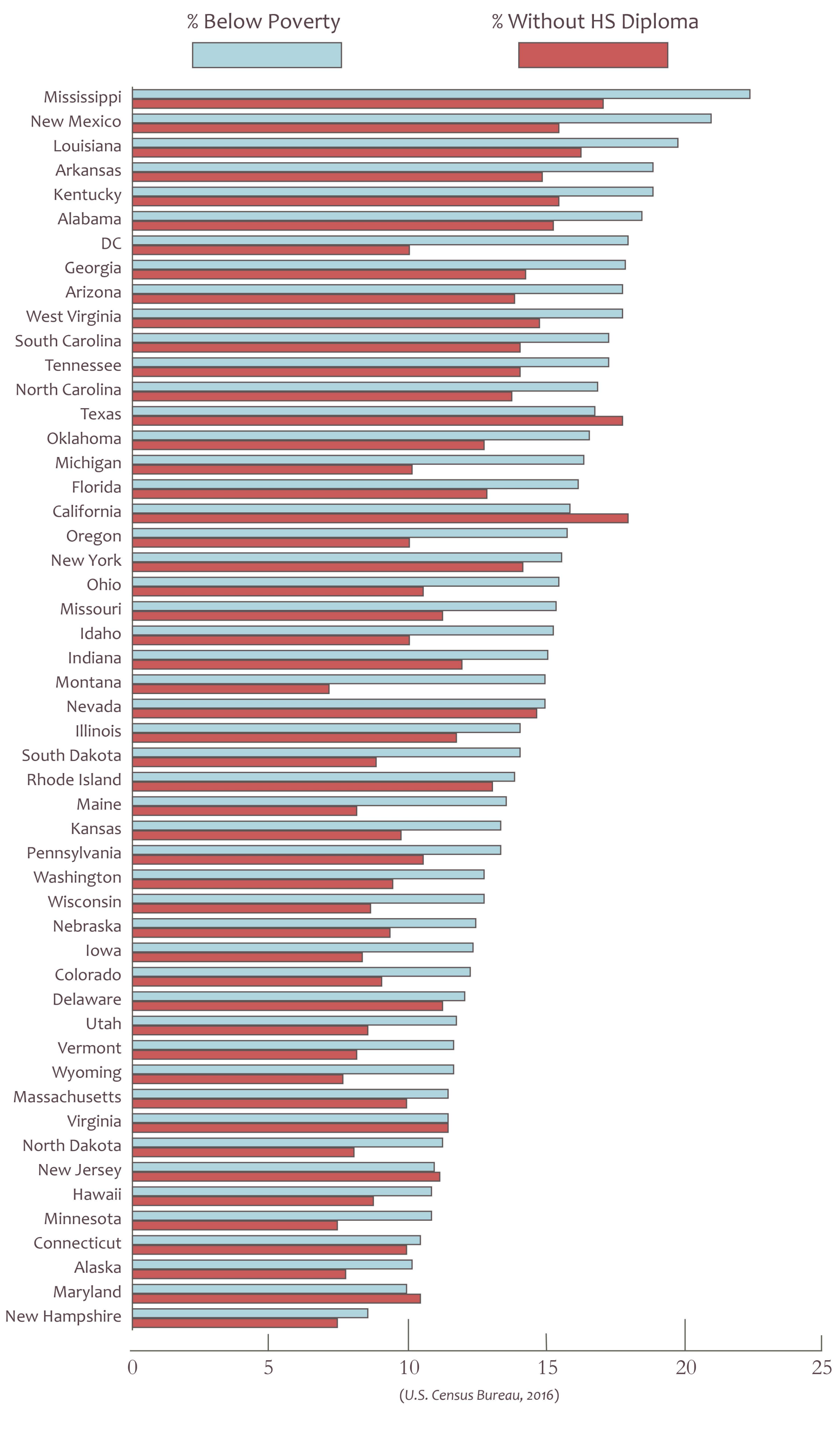


HS Graduation Rates Compared to Poverty Rates for U.S counties



(U.S. Census Bureau, 2016)

The graph above shows the inverse relationship between poverty rates and high school graduation rates. The general trend is that **as high school graduation rates increase, there is a decrease in the poverty rate** per county. In the graph below, graduation and poverty rates can be seen side by side for each state, allowing for state-to-state comparisons:

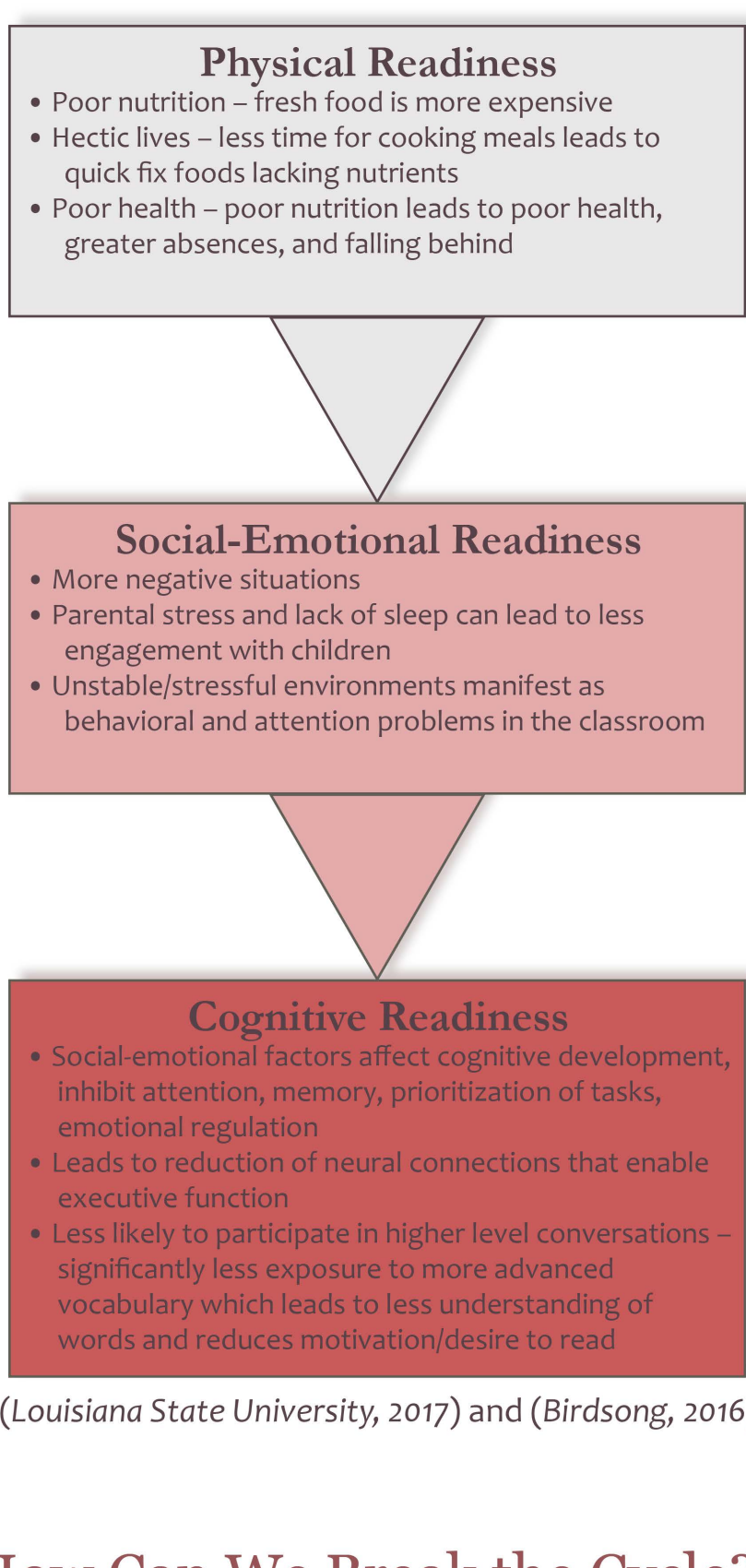
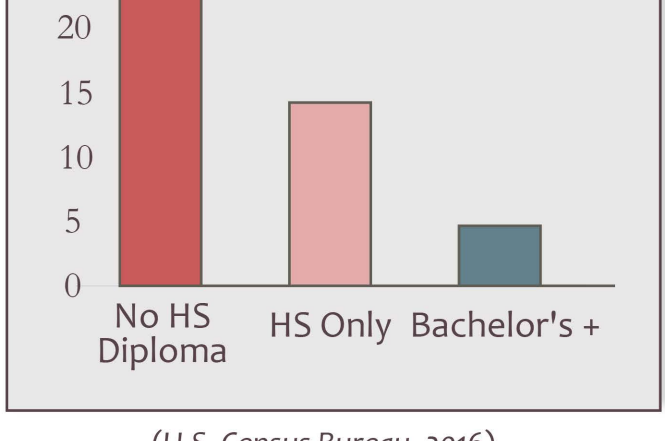


The relationship between education attainment and poverty is well documented. Educational outcomes are heavily influenced by family incomes, and children from low income families are much more likely to fall behind their peers (as measured by school readiness), even before they begin school (Ferguson, Bovaird, and Mueller, 2007).

Healthy development is crucial in building a foundation for academic success, and while education is the key to escaping poverty - simultaneously, poverty is the largest obstacle to educational achievement (Birdsong, 2016).

The cumulative effects of poverty can decrease the likelihood of academic success by negatively impacting a child's stages of academic readiness from the beginning.

% Poverty by Education Level



(Louisiana State University, 2017) and (Birdsong, 2016)

How Can We Break the Cycle?

The parent-child relationship holds the greatest influence on reducing the effects of poverty by shaping a child's early stages of development (Ferguson et al., 2007). However, it has also been shown that children who have access to early childhood programs do better in elementary school and have better educational achievements later on (Global Partnership for Education, n.d). Parent education programs in combination with child programs have been found to have the highest rates of success and the longest lasting effects (Ferguson et al., 2007). Experts emphasize the importance of these programs to provide extended support outside of the school environment.

Education reduces poverty, increases personal income, and boosts economic growth (Global Partnership for Education, n.d) – but while schools are a critical component for success, they don't have the ability to equalize the socio-economic deficit. Planning, finance, opportunity, and support are necessary to acquire the education needed for high-paying employment, and these are exactly the areas where low-income families are most likely to be disadvantaged (Birdsong, 2016). By identifying the processes and geographies of poverty, governments and organizations can better allocate resources and implement more effective programs to assist those in need.

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